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The Truth and the Treaty

The Jan. 7 letter from Secretary of State George Shultz to a Republican presidential contender erroneously claiming that all is well between Moscow and Washington on the INF Treaty suggests an administration ready to do and say anything for ratification, even down to concealing the truth from Congress.

That mistake was imposed on Shultz by his aides, but it seems inexcusable. His letter to Rep. Jack Kemp, answering a letter from Kemp, said that "the overall data" supplied by Moscow under the INF treaty "fits within our . . . estimates." Yet on that very day he signed a top-secret order to Ambassador Jack Matlock in Moscow to inform the highest Soviet level that a "serious discrepancy" had been found in the photographic data submitted by the Soviets on the SS-23 missile.

To blame this sorry and potentially costly contradiction on Shultz would be unfair. The secretary presides over broad agendas and grand strategies. He has never pretended to be a nuts-and-bolts arms control expert. He is not interested in arcane intelligence matters and does not busy himself with mystifying differences between various Soviet missiles and their photographs required by the INF treaty.

But his quick, flat denial of Kemp's considered charges about the reliability of Soviet data, coupled with his simultaneous demarche to the Kremlin over the quality of that data, could be ruinous to credibility.

Credibility is further undermined by private revelations to us from administration officials that the United States has made inadvertent mistakes of its own in supplying the nuts-and-bolts data to Moscow under terms of the treaty. This bolsters charges that INF was rushed to completion so quickly that neither side has an accurate and total picture of what the agreement demands.

This is the same brand of helter-skelter negotiating that wrecked past U.S.-Soviet nuclear pacts. U.S. charges of Soviet cheating and Soviet denials have hounded the Anti-Ballistic Missile treaty, the SALT I "Interim" agreement and the unratified SALT II treaty. The stage-setting may now be in progress for a raising of the curtain on yet another melodrama.

Both Shultz's letter to Kemp and his demarche to the Soviet Union via Matlock appear to have been written without the usual interagency conversations. Instead, Shultz's diplomats acted hurriedly on their own hook, as described by one administration insider, "in order to squelch Kemp" before his complaint gathered

momentum. The quick follow-up to Matlock had the same purpose: obtain the correct data on all the involved missiles before any new questions could be raised.

Questionable pictures of the SS-20 and the SS-23, moreover, represent only a fraction of the contradictions that Shultz must explain to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee after ratification hearings start Jan. 25. Intelligence officials cannot explain why the Soviets listed only a score of sites representing bases and facilities for SS-20s—short of the number long accepted by the United States.

Similarly, the Memorandum of Understanding between the United States and Soviets, which outlines the required data each side is committed to give the other, shows only 405 SS-20 deployed missile sites in the

Soviet Union. For years, the United States has used the figure 441. The discrepancy is a mystery. So is the intelligence estimate that other SS-20 missile sites have "disappeared" (been lost to U.S. spy cameras).

Shultz and other administration witnesses will have plenty of time to explain these discrepancies to the Foreign Relations Committee. But will they? Instead of candor, the letter to Kemp suggests that Ronald Reagan's diplomats may be more interested in cover-up and deception.

That creates an atmosphere on Capitol Hill not at all conducive to the overwhelming INF ratification vote and follow-up support for the vastly more important and critical strategic arms pact the president ardently seeks.

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Commentary

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